

How sleep can affect your mental health

Tictrac | Sep 6, 2021



Unfulfilling sleep is a key factor in our mental health, both as a symptom of a potential issue or potentially connected to a pre-existing health concern. The correlation between sleep and our mental health can be cyclical, as there is a close relationship between the two.

Fundamentally, living with a mental health concern can impact our sleep quality, and poor sleep can have a negative impact on our mental health [1]. On the other side of the coin, a great night's sleep can really help us to wake up feeling refreshed, energised and with a positive outlook for the day ahead.

Quality rest allows our bodies to repair themselves and gives our brains the required time to consolidate our memories and process information, making it just as essential for our wellbeing as eating, drinking, and breathing [2].

REM sleep and our mental wellbeing

While we sleep our brain activity fluctuates through different sleep stages, making up our sleep cycle. In the NREM (non-rapid eye movement) state of sleep, our overall brain activity is slower with the occasional burst of energy and with REM (rapid eye movement) sleep, brain activity is a lot livelier, leading to intense and vivid dreams.

Each of these stages are essential for our brain health, facilitating improved learning, cognition, and memory, whilst having a profound impact on our mental health.



REM sleep is said to be especially tied to the processing of emotions and a lack of this type of rest can influence our mood and emotional reactivity, possibly impacting the severity of some mental health disorders [3].

If you are struggling with lacklustre rest that is taking its toll on your mental wellbeing, there are some great habits and changes you can implement to shake up your sleep routine and make the most out of your slumber.

Cut back on caffeine, alcohol and nicotine

Lifestyle changes such as cutting back on caffeine, alcohol and nicotine may be a great place to start. A glass of wine before bed may initially help us to feel sleepy because alcohol depresses the nervous system. However, this wears off after a few hours and can cause us to wake up in the night, leading to bad quality sleep.

As well as this, caffeine and nicotine are both stimulant substances, which heighten our heart rate and boost the speed of cognitive processes, meaning we feel wide awake. Try cutting these out in the afternoon or evening, especially just before bed [4].

Sort a sleep schedule



Allowing yourself to stick to a routine of going to bed and waking up at similar times each day can help your body relax into a state of rest, meaning you are more likely to wake up fully rejuvenated. If you are in bed but don't fall asleep within 20 minutes, it is recommended that you get up until you feel tired again [5].

Ditch naps

Because of the importance of this sleep schedule, taking a nap (as tempting as it can sometimes be) can make you less tired in the evening, and they can also interfere with your sleep rhythm and ability to settle down.

Try to limit your afternoon snoozing sessions if you have difficulty drifting off into deep sleep at night, to ensure an evening of healing sleep that can help enhance overall mental wellbeing.

Walk it out

Working out can be a great boost both physically and mentally. The action of using both our body and mind during the day for even a short walk assists in expelling excess energy that may keep us awake. This in turn helps to ensure that our brain is ready to rest come evening.



Ease off electronics

It is recommended that we turn off electronic devices such as our television or phones at least an hour before we go to sleep [6]. The stimulation of the movement, light and action can keep our brains active and alert, which doesn't put us in the right frame of mind for a night of deep, restorative sleep.

Reading or engaging in a comforting task like knitting can help us wind down and find peace and calm before we settle in for the night.

-
1. [How to cope with sleep problems](#) Mind, May, 2020.
 2. [Sleep matters: the impact of sleep on health and wellbeing](#) Mental Health Foundation, May, 2011.
 3. [Mental health and sleep](#) Sleep Foundation, September 18, 2020.
 4. [Sleep and mental health](#) Harvard Health, March 18, 2019.
 5. [Sleep anxiety](#) Cleveland Clinic, June 13, 2021.
 6. [5 tips for getting quality sleep during the covid 19 pandemic](#) Mayo Clinic, April 13, 2020.